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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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NURSERY MANAGEMENT.

BY A NURSE.

I. FRESH AIR AND SUITABLE FOOD.

THE four great necessities to right bodily development are (1) fresh air, (2) suitable food, (3) cleanliness, (4) warm clothing.

Of these four *fresh air* comes first of all, because it will sustain us longer than any of the other sustainers of life. Knowing that fresh air treatment in many cases cures consumption, what possibilities may there not be in it as a preventive agent both of nervous and other disorders as well as of phthisis? For children nothing is so beneficial as a healthy outdoor life, and I think it is quite safe to say that children should go out in all weathers, taking special precautions in cases of fog or East wind. A child accustomed to sudden changes of temperature can even brave an East wind, for after all it is not the actual wind which gives cold, but the keenness of it causes vitality to run very low, and unless a child's nerves are subject to quick reaction in the matter of heat and cold, the surface of the body becomes naturally chilled and if this continues the result is a cold. Still only half the possible amount of good will be derived from an outdoor life if, when the children are in the house, they are boxed up in stuffy rooms.

Above all rooms *nurseries* should be thoroughly ventilated. Efficient ventilation consists of good inflow of fresh air and provides for outflow of foul air. Large articles of furniture are very detrimental to the atmosphere of a room, because they occupy the space which might otherwise be filled with air. Scraps of food, dirty linen, soiled napkins all contaminate the air. One window at least should be always open and more if possible. It must be borne in mind that exhaled air ascends, and unless precaution is taken for its escape it rapidly cools and descends and will be inhaled by the inmates of the nursery. The immediate result of constantly inhaling impure air is faintness and drowsiness, and if constantly made a practice of must lead to general debility of the whole system.

Draughts must at all costs be avoided, especially those caused by badly fitting doors and windows, or those caused by open windows opposite either open doors or fireplaces.

Sunlight is quite as necessary as fresh air; truly the latter purifies the blood, but it is the sun which gives the colouring matter making the blood red. The proverb, "Where the sun does not come the doctor does," is very true, and surely it is better to sacrifice the colours of carpet and curtains than the health of even one child.

The artificial lighting of the nursery is a very important matter. Lights which consume as little oxygen as possible should be chosen. Considering that one gas jet consumes as much oxygen as three adults, the conclusion is quickly drawn that gas is not a desirable method of lighting. If paraffine lamps are used, they must be kept scrupulously clean to avoid tainting the air with the smell of paraffine. Further, great care must be taken that the lamp or lamps stand very securely. Lamps placed on small tables or brackets are most dangerous; equally so is a small lamp placed on a cloth covered table. Children so often pull a tablecloth, and unless a lamp has weight enough to hold the cloth, it must of necessity be pulled off with it. Undoubtedly the best method is to have the nursery lighted by sconces from the walls or ceiling. Children should not be encouraged to do needlework or reading requiring close attention by artificial light. At all times when doing lessons of any kind be careful to arrange that the light should reach the child on his left side.

The temperature of the nursery should be from 50° to 60°. A thermometer should hang on an inside wall, but not near the fire or the chimney shaft of an adjoining room. It is well to know that when moving a convalescent child from one room to another the temperature of the two rooms must be exactly the same to avoid risk of either cold or overheating. The best method of heating a nursery is certainly by means of open fires. Gas or other stoves are not good to use. Moreover fire is such a great purifier and this is especially useful in cases of sickness.

Abundant *exercise* in the fresh air is necessary for children to develop strong healthy lungs. Running is especially good, for it causes the breathing to become quicker and deeper,

so that the air is drawn deeper into the lungs. Children always greatly benefit by riding exercise, provided they do not have too long at one time. Girls as well as boys should begin riding astride, the only difference being that girls should not ride at full stretch as boys do, also discretion must be used to keep the pony's girth narrow enough. Children of the nursery age soon tire of the daily formal walks; when this is the case only half the possible amount of good is derived. With a little forethought so much interest can be attached to walks, country walks especially. The main point is to start out with a definite object in view; one day it can be a bird walk, during which special notice shall be given to the different birds which are seen, the notes of those out of view can be distinguished and nests new or old examined. Then on coming in from the walk it is a good plan for the nurse to write down at the children's dictation the various items noticed during the walk. Other walks can have as their object the study of one or two animals as found in ponds, flower collecting, blackberry gathering, and many other interesting things. I consider with these walks double the amount of good is done, if a diary is kept of the various "finds" and experiences. A visit to a village post office to buy stamps, or more enchanting still "picture" postcards, is most educational in teaching the children by experience the elements of buying and selling.

With country children I think it quite sufficient if they have one walk a day and that preferably in the afternoon. The mornings can be spent in gardening, attending to pets, or even making mud pies; all these occupations are as beneficial as a walk. Then there are games to be brought in during the day; if numbers permit, those games are best which allow of "sides"—it is so much better to do your level best for your side instead of trying to win a game on your own merits and for your own personal glory—as these are excellent examples of united effort, and above all do teach your children by example how to play a losing game, that is, to recognise in the winners their superiority of play. It is hard to be bowled out middle stump first ball, but surely disappointment can leave room for a fair share of admiration of the bowler.

In towns of course children's exercise is of necessity much

restricted, and perhaps both mornings and afternoons must be spent in walks. The monotony of these walks can be minimised by balls, hoops or skipping ropes.

One word to nurses as to their attitude during these walks. Do avoid walking yards ahead with your charges straggling behind, and however bored you may feel, do cultivate a habit of cheerful interest in the children's amusements.

So much for the subject of exercise, but to enable a child to take sufficient to develop his body he must also have considerable time devoted to rest.

Rest is required physically, in order that the various organs may have time to repair lost energy. An overtired body means also (especially with children) a tired brain; the two combined can produce almost anything, including fractiousness and indigestion. Children up to the age of at least eight years require not less than one hour's mid-day rest, if possible two hours, the rest being taken on or in bed in a darkened room. Up to this age ten hours nightly sleep must be allowed. At this rate a child will spend half his day in bed, so it is most necessary that every child is trained to lie in a healthy position, legs straight down, and the child laying on his side, preferably the right (with babies they must be laid on the right and left alternately to prevent the head from becoming depressed on either side), with hands on or under the pillow. In illness so much can be gained from careful watching of the child's position in bed, noting every deviation from his usual healthy attitude. Then rest is required mentally to allow the brain to recuperate. When we realise that for the first few years of its life a child spends all and every day of its life in seeing and hearing new things, in fact 365 days per annum in sight seeing, then one understands that above all things a child requires a daily pause during which time he is surrounded only with objects with which he is quite familiar, and which consequently will not make any fresh impression on his brain.

Suitable food is the second great necessity of physical well-being. Suitable food is food which is suitable to the age and conditions of the consumer. Not only must nurses know what food stuffs are suitable to children of various conditions, but they should also know the best methods of preparing

and cooking the same. In order that food may nourish the body it must contain the same elements of which the body is composed, viz., oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and mineral salts. Milk is a perfect food because it contains all these elements in the right proportion. Other foods may also contain all the elements, but one of them may be present in too large or too small a quantity; in the former case it must be reduced and in the latter increased in quantity. As long as children are of the nursery age they should begin the day with a well-cooked milk food. Porridge is an excellent start, and this can be followed by bacon, fish or egg. Before a child reaches the bacon stage, bacon gravy on bread can be given occasionally. No stimulants in the shape of tea, coffee or cocoa are necessary. Milk, barley water, weak lemonade (made from fresh lemons), and pure filtered water are all advisable drinks. As one of the most necessary safeguards, I think all drinking water should be filtered, and it is much the best for the nursery to possess a small filter of its own. The "Pasteur" germ-proof filter, holding two gallons, is a good nursery size, and it is a make which requires cleaning out every fortnight, and this cleaning should, like an infant's bottles, surely fall to the lot of the *head nurse* and not be trusted to an underling. With animal food the great things to avoid are all hung meats, young meats (lamb, veal), and internal organs (heart, kidneys, liver). Chicken, chop, roast beef full of gravy, pheasant (fresh killed), pigeon, and partridge are all suitable, as are boiled fish, such as whiting, sole, plaice, trout, and fresh haddock.

Vegetables of which the root is eaten (turnip, carrot, and parsnips in particular) are most indigestible. Old potatoes, as long as they remain sound, are better than new ones. Spinach, cauliflower, lettuce, brussels sprouts and, in moderation, cabbage, may all be given, but the effect on each individual child must be noticed.

Soups are not desirable items of nursery diet, because they contain the maximum of bulk and the minimum of nourishment.

Fruit, both stewed and raw, is most excellent to give, provided all skins, stones, and pips are excluded.

Puddings made with milk, such as farola, tapioca, sago, cornflour, ground rice, and custard should find a place in

every nursery diet. Suet pudding served with jam or treacle is very wholesome and nourishing, and can be especially used on those days when fish is given instead of meat. Cold milk shape and junket are also useful nursery puddings.

Brown wholemeal *bread* is very nourishing if well made. Cakes should be home-made, and contain neither currants, sultanas nor raisins. Every scrap of food which is undigested not only fails to nourish but irritates and thus weakens the digestive organs.

It is unfair to overtax any child's digestion during the nursery age. The damage may at the time be imperceptible, but it is bound to show in one form or another when the child reaches adult life. As far as possible all meat and fish should be given warm. The giving of cold foods overtaxes a child's digestion; it is quite enough for a child to digest his food without having also to heat it up to digesting point, as must be the case if the food is given cold. Another great tax on a child's digestion is the giving of food at too frequent intervals. Three good meals a day are all that are required by children between the ages of three and eight, beginning at 8 a.m. and ending at 4.30 p.m. The best start and finish to each day, irrespective of meals, is a cup of cold water. Then children must be taught the medium between bolting their food and chewing it too much; in the former case the organs of digestion have too much to do and in the latter too little, in both of which cases the organs are impaired.